19/6/74

To John

Six Dukes etc

c/o The Little Company of Mary
Calvary Nursing Home
Sudbury Hill
Harrow-on-the-Hill,
Middlesex, England

Die 19 Junii S. Julianae de Falconeriis
anno ab Incarnatione Xti. 1974.

Dearest Joan

Well, it was a pleasure & surprize to get yr letter written on May 24 and now its June 19. Forgive my not sooner writing to thank you, but I'm so littered with piled up (or rather ~~s~~chaotically heaped up) with papers letters bits of writings maybe of the 1930s or 1940s – fragments stuff along with stuff of the day before yesterday or of to-day ~~&~~ I am overjoyed that you ~~should~~ should find something to respond to in The Sleeping Lord. That's wonderful news for me. Yes I thought dear René's review article was splendid. I wrote to him a day or so back expressing my pleasure about that. Now I cant put my hand on it ~~that~~ ~~not~~ it was hand-written; I suppose he has a typescript copy of it. I was & am, as you suggest in your letter, terribly upset about dear Bernard's death – I find it hard to ~~believ~~ believe that he's ~~no~~ no longer alive. It so happened that after a good many months of not seeing him he chanced to come with Kathleen Raine & a few days later come when René was here, I ~~was~~ am very glad for seeing him so recently though at the time (~~a~~ a day or so before the thing at the Mermaid Theatre) I had no thought that

NB Not read through for I must get it in envelope & stamped & ready for posting — so excuse muddles or mistakes of all sorts.
David.

would so soon die in hospital. But René thought he looked terribly ill & but I thought he looked if anything better than he had a little back.

To turn from sorrow to a lighter vein, I'll tell you of a thing that will amuse you (I hope) before I forget.

A bit back that business of making the ~~[illegible]~~ Latin of the Mass in the ~~[illegible]~~ English vernacular. You know those versicles & responds that precede the Preface, one of which is Gratias agamus Domino Deo nostro which one of my friends said he thought the English translation "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God" was ~~a perfectly~~ a good idiomatic, brief, straightforward English rendering of the Latin; to which his mate replied, "Well, I dunno what you call brief, idiomatic, contemporary English, but what's wrong with "Thanks a lot."

Anyway dear Joan, thanks a lot for yr letter. Yes it was a great surprise & pleasure when one of the sisters here opened my door & said "Two friends to see you." and in came Petra & Charlotte. I had not seen Charlotte for god knows how long — but thought of her as having very fair wavy hair & she looked awfully nice but with tightly drawn back hair — a very nice face. It was awfully good of them to come out here for they were going to the Mermaid Theatre thing that evening. For a moment, a ~~split~~ split second, I dont think I recognized Petra, until she spoke, but it was such a surprise and the light not too good. I had last met her at Douglas Cleverdon's on my seventieth Birthday party — so that was only seven or eight years ago. But dont think her hair was silver white & cut short — as it is now — nor, I think, was she then wearing glasses as now — anyway it was only for a second that I failed to recognize her.. She looked extremely well & said that both she & Denis liked the place they lived in which I was very glad about, and that Denis made engravings & water colour drawings & we talked about this & that & it was a very enjoyable visit. As they had not yet [illegible] been the Mermaid Theatre thing, but were going that [illegible] evening, so I could not ask them what they thought of it.

I've had so many ~~telegraph~~ telegrams, letters post-cards etc. about this [illegible] C.H. thing, and some of them also mentioned the Mermaid thing as well — they all had enjoyed it too & said that René's talk was splendid — some were a bit sorry that comparatively speaking, there were fewer bits of recordings of myself reading the stuff but that, none the less, it was well done.

Dear Bernard (lux perpetua luceat ei) — was there & took the trouble to 'phone here on the Monday morning to tell one of the sisters that he only wished her to let me know it was in his view, a most moving thing & he wanted me to know, which they did.

I was so pleased that I had remembered more or less the ~~or~~ *Six Dukes* — & most grateful to René for his letter telling me all about the history. I told him in my last letter that I *could not* find the sheet in which he so carefully gave the ~~phonetics~~ phonetics of the vowels — I can't make it out because the pages 1 to 5 link up properly as far as I can see. — but I'm [illegible] capable of getting *anything* mixed up or mislaid or lost. Anyway maybe next time René is able to come we'll sort it out. It would be wonderful if you could as you suggest might be possible to come later on.

I'm in an appalling muddle with mixed up papers & ~~letters~~ now more letters etc owing to the C.H.

I *can't* cope with answering them, for I *must* get on, if possible, with *The Kensington Mass* ~~and~~ if I start writing letters then the *Ken. Mass* poem or what ever it is, gets no further. My eyes also worry me a lot. I'm very glad that

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Your sprained ankle is getting better. A real sprained ankle is a *perfect brute* — as I have cause to know. I had one in London during the Second War — & it was, if anything, worse than the one at Limerick. *Must* stop dear Joan. This was only to thank you for writing.

I wanted to spell Joan in that other way but can't remember how to spell it. It has three syllables & with an 'h' somewhere in it — I know Eric often used that form & also René — it's a mediaeval form. This inability to spell is an awful curse. People who can spell have no idea of the nuisance of not being able to spell can be. I like the story of the child who said "But what's the good of a dictionary unless you can spell already" There is more truth in that than is generally thought. I was more than half an hour wading through the *Shorter OX Eng.* Dictionary the other day, because I thought a word I had reason to use ~~began with~~ had in its first syllable the letter 'i' whereas 'e' was in fact the case — I remember that when I was in a particularly nasty bit of trench in Flanders, drenched with rain & mud, the post came up & in it a letter from my mother. toward the end of which she had written "the spelling in your last letter was a disgrace to the family — a child of four would do better," or words to that effect. Those Victorian women were very hot on spelling — my mother could spell almost *any* word in the English language.

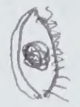
Absolutely must stop now
Much love to yourself & to
René of course

Bendith arnoch

Love from Dai

thats only Welsh for 'Blessing on you'

They ~~join~~ join the preposition *ar* = on, to the pronoun, in this case 'you'; *arnaf* would mean 'on me'; on thee, *arnat*. on him *arno*, on her, *arni*.

Speaking of phonetics did I ever tell you of a ~~Welsh~~ Welsh friend of mine who understood Welsh only until he had to go to the local elementary school when he was five or six. At that date (the 1890s) no Welsh was allowed & all instruction was in English. He was at a desk in a school room that was divided from the next room by a wooden wall the top part of which was glass, so he could see the black board or part of it in the next room and saw in white chalk this diagram, the letter 'I' followed by =  and as in Welsh the letter 'i' is pronounced *ee*, he thought to himself, "Well, I ~~know~~ know they are wicked men but I didn't think they would deliberately deceive little ~~children~~ children like that especially ~~for~~ as everybody knows that the letter 'i' is universally pronounced *ee*." In Welsh *i* is a pure vowel approximating to 'ee', it has a short & a long form but remains phonetically *ee*. When long it is more or less like the Eng 'ee' in 'seed' when short it is more like the English 'i' in pig.

this was still the case until well into the present century. indeed I think until the 1930s or 1940s